

Recognizing the Author's Tone

The **tone** of a passage is **the manner in which the author expresses his/her feelings or attitude about the topic**. The author's tone is revealed through word choice and sentence structure.

There are two things you can look for when you are discerning the author's tone.

1. What type of words did the author use?

Remember, words have both dictionary definitions (denotations) and implied meanings (extra meanings that are related to one's feelings about the word). Authors influence their readers by the words they choose to describe and discuss their topic.

2. What is the author's attitude about the topic?

Tone is strongly influenced by the author's attitude regarding the topic. If an author dislikes the topic, his or her negative attitude will be evident. If an author likes the topic, a positive attitude will be evident.



Errors on tone questions are often the result of vocabulary difficulties. Students usually can identify the tone of the passage, but cannot select the proper word choice to describe it!

Knowing the meaning of the following tone words can help you to pinpoint the author's tone.

1. **ambivalent, ambivalence** – having opposing feelings such as love and hate, feeling uncertain
2. **amused, amusement** - pleasure or humor
3. **apathetic** – showing a lack of concern; indifference
4. **arrogant** – feeling superior to others
5. **awe** – respect or dread
6. **bitter** – severe grief or disappointment
7. **comic** – amusing; humorous
8. **compassionate** – sympathy or pity
9. **condescending** – feeling superior to others
10. **condemnation** – strong disapproval
11. **cynical** – feeling that others are motivated by selfishness

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12. **detached** – emotionally uninvolved
13. **distressed** – strained; anxious
14. **earnest** – sincere; serious
15. **impassioned** – feeling strongly about a topic
16. **incredulous** – disbelief
17. **indignant** – feeling of anger against something unjust, mean, or unworthy
18. **ironic** – feeling sarcastic
19. **irreverent** – disrespectful
20. **malicious** – spiteful, deliberately harmful
21. **matter of fact** – straightforward, not emotional
22. **mocking** – ridiculing; making fun of
23. **melancholy** – sadness; depression
24. **nostalgic** – feeling a bittersweet longing for the past
25. **objective** – not influenced by emotion
26. **optimistic** – hopeful
27. **outraged** – angered by a violent or offensive act
28. **outspoken** – candid, holding nothing back
29. **passionate** – feeling strong emotion
30. **pessimistic** – feeling defeated; negative
31. **reticent** – not inclined to speak out
32. **reverent** – feeling of awe, respect
33. **sarcastic** – expressing ridicule that stings or wounds
34. **satirical** – cutting, reproachful
35. **sentimental** – excessively emotional
36. **scornful** – feeling contempt or hatred
37. **solemn** – deeply serious; sober
38. **straightforward** – not emotional
39. **sympathetic** – understanding
40. **uneasy** – awkward or unsure
41. **vindictive** – desiring revenge

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